

POLLARD: Governor reaches a bit too far across the aisle

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SACRAMENTO -- It was one of those "oops!" moments everybody should have seen coming.

But not everybody did, at least on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's staff.

In one of a series of media events he held last week to polish his law-and-order credentials for his re-election campaign, the Republican governor announced he planned to sponsor a "Crime Victims Bill of Rights."

It seemed like a run-of-the-mill event until Democratic Assemblywoman Nicole Parra put out a press release a couple of hours before the governor's Tuesday event in Oakland, announcing she planned to attend and "present" her proposed ballot measure that would rewrite the "Victims Bill of Rights" in the state constitution.

That was the first public clue that the Republican governor planned to embrace a bill by the Democratic assemblywoman from the San Joaquin Valley.

And it sent Republican leaders in the Assembly and the Senate into a tizzy.

Parra is one of the few Democratic legislators the Republicans have any hope of defeating in November -- maybe the only one.

After two elections in which the GOP was unable to beat Parra because they put up a badly flawed candidate (Bakersfield businessman Dean Gardner) Republican eyes are gleaming at what they feel is a good shot at taking Parra out.

"We're gong to win this one," said former Assembly Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield.

Their candidate, Danny Gilmore, is a GOP campaign manager's dream -- a conservative Republican, a retired California Highway Patrol official, a churchgoer, a family man, and on and on.

Imagine their dismay at the prospect of Parra running a television ad showing a beaming governor side-by-side with her, endorsing her crime bill.

At the very least, it could nullify the governor's expected endorsement of Gilmore.

No one would talk on the record later about what really happened as word spread that the governor was about to commit a major political faux pas.

Gilmore took the high road, saying he had no problem with the governor reaching across the aisle on an important issue.

The current Assembly GOP leader, George Plescia of La Jolla, did not respond to a request for comment.

But it wasn't long before Sen. Roy Ashburn, R-Bakersfield, said he had heard of a change in plans.

"I don't think that's going to happen," he said, although he declined to elaborate.

And indeed, Parra's spokesman, Ioannis Kazanis, soon called to inform this reporter that she had changed her mind and would not be attending the governor's event after all. It was a day full of legislative committee hearings in Sacramento, and Parra couldn't get away, he said.

He insisted, though, that Parra had not been disinvited to the event.

So did Darrel Ng, in the governor's press office.

"Our understanding is that she had committee business here in Sacramento," he said.

After the Oakland event was over, it appeared all sides tried to downplay the political implications. The press release put out by the governor's office did not mention the name of the author carrying the legislation.

Parra's office put out a statement saying she "was unable to participate in the governor's press conference regarding her 'Victims Bill of Rights' due to her obligations as a member of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee."

Nevertheless, the political stakes in the potential boo-boo were unmistakable in comments made later by Joe Justin, the political consultant hired to oversee Assembly Republican campaigns this year.

"She didn't attend," Justin said. "If she'd been there, I would have been all over it, but she wasn't."